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Spring 2020

Aspen Olsen - Highland Elementary School

Aspen Olsen

University of Northern Colorado

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Aspen Olsen - Highland Elementary School

Robert and Yvonne Koob Fund for Student Community Engagement

Instructions: Please work with your internship supervisor to fill out this form. Once completed, return to Kristina Kofoot [redacted]

Name: Aspen Olsen **Agency:** Highland Elementary

Intern's Phone Number and E-mail Address [redacted]

Organization Contact Person and Phone : Roshawn Berry: [redacted]
[redacted]

Academic Advisor and Phone: Dr. Matthew Vasquez: [redacted]
[redacted]

Future Plans for student: [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]

What did you accomplish during your internship?

Unfortunately, my time at Highland Elementary was cut abruptly short due to school closures as a result of COVID-19 . However, I was able to work with a caseload of an average of 10 students. I provided one-on-one therapist sessions once weekly. I worked with them to process trauma, learn how to self-regulate their emotions, work on alleviating problematic behaviors in the classroom, and/or develop coping skills and strategies. More specifically in the sessions, we completed Theraplay Exercises, Sand Tray Therapy, played Emotion Uno, made Stress Balls, etc. I helped determine the needs of the students and helped connect them and their families to resources. I also educated on trauma-informed practices as appropriate. I also planned a community resource fair. We were unable to host the fair due to COVID-19, but I did all the work and made the connections. I also completed the application for a grant for the fair. I am hoping the school uses my materials to host the fair next year. Also, during my internship, I had some major life changes, unexpectedly. I became a mother overnight to my siblings and nieces due to an immediate removal order by DHS/the courts. It was challenging juggling school, court

dates, dhs involvement, internship, college, state boards, etc. However, I succeeded in the face of adversity and have been embracing the lifestyle change.

How did the internship benefit the student?

My internship with Highland Elementary has been very rewarding and vital for my professional development. I got my first clinician experience. I was able to learn how to complete therapy with young children. Most of the course material at UNI was geared towards how to process and work with trauma in adults. Children are unable to process trauma in the same way as adults. They cannot verbalize their trauma or fully understand. They process trauma through play. I grew strong bonds with many of the children at Highland Elementary. Many of the children at Highland are living in poverty and have some type of trauma. It was rewarding to know that the children felt comfortable with me. My supervisor would let me know when the children asked about me when I was not there, and that was heartwarming. I had many little victories with the students. For example, there was a 1st grader who would not stop running in the hallways. The teachers and staff would ask him to walk or go slower. He would then fast walk in the hallways. He did what they asked, he walked and was going slower than before. He was unable to conceptualize what walking slowly meant. Therefore, I completed a Theraplay activity with him. I put a beanbag on his head and asked him to walk to the other side of the room without letting the beanbag fall. He did this with ease. I then put a beanbag on his head and then one on his arm and asked him to walk to the other side of the room. He had to walk much more carefully and slowly to prevent the bags from falling. Now, this child has a tangible concept of what it means to walk slowly. When he is running in the hallways, instead of asking him to walk, we can ask him to walk like he has a beanbag on his head. He learned this skill while playing and having fun. From my experience at Highland, I solidified that fact that I want to work in a school setting. I would love to help a school become a trauma-informed organization. I completed my graduate research on the effectiveness of trauma-informed schools, and the preliminary data is promising. Schools are the best way to reach children. We need to be more proactive than reactive. We need to teach children how to cope effectively, how to manage emotions, to give them a safe space to share, ensure that their basic needs are being met, and in return, we will receive higher test scores, better functioning classrooms, higher graduation rates, lower juvenile delinquency rates, better mental and physical health, and overall, better outcomes for our children.

How did the internship benefit the agency?

I believe that Highland Elementary benefited from my internship by being able to reach more students. The counselor and at-risk coordinator do not have the time or resources to reach all the students that need help. Highland Elementary is located in a low-income, high crime, and ethnically diverse area, and the many students have experienced high levels of trauma.

Although my caseload was a very small portion of the student population, I was able to reach a few kids and help them process their trauma to thrive in the academic setting.

How does the internship benefit the community?

My big plan to impact the community was through the community resource fair I was planning. The hope for the community resource fair is to connect families to community resources they may not be aware are available to them. Our students cannot learn when their families are struggling. For example, it is hard for our students to learn complex math equations when they are tired due to not sleeping well last night as they are living in a small car with their large family. By connecting the families to the community resources, our goal is that the families will get the help they need, and our students can focus on their studies. This in turn will improve the school's lower than state average proficiency rates. In addition, we hope that the community resource fair will assist families out of crisis situations, and our students will experience less trauma or adverse childhood experiences. It is very important for our school to work with community agencies to support our student's academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs. Collaborating with a variety of community agencies to support the needs of students and their families is key to help students be successful, not only in school but in their personal life.

(Student to complete) One quote that describes the experience gained from completing this internship (to be used for promotional materials; please specify author of quote)?

When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower. –
Alexander Den Heijer

(Intern supervisor to complete) One quote that describes the impact the intern had on the community (to be used for promotional materials; please specify author of quote)?

My attempt to reach my supervisor was unsuccessful, however, he put this on my final evaluation. "Aspen has worked incredibly hard when she has been at Highland. She is committed to our students and helping them through their day."

Please provide:

- **A reproducible photo of the intern in action at their internship for media purposes** (No pictures were taken at my internship due to the sudden closure due to COVID-19. If necessary, I can go take a picture in front of the school building.)
- **If applicable, a copy of materials created by the intern including but not limited to: books, program materials, videos, promotional materials etc.**